One Man Still Lives Who Saw George Washington in the Flesh

It Was Not Until the Father of His Country Had Been Dead Nearly Twoscore Years That John Lane, Then a Lad of Twelve, Gazed Upon His Features.

As the anniversary of the birth of Washington approaches it is interesting to know that there is a man still living in this, the twentieth century who gazed on the face of the Father of His Country, who died in the eighteenth century—112 years ago, to be correct. This man who actually saw the countenance of George Washington is still in possession of his faculties and remembers well how that great man looked. He is not merely the only man alive to-day who ever saw the first President's face, but he is the only man of present generations who ever had that privilege. He is this generation's nearest tie to the actual, physical Washington.

For even this man, John Lane, of the city of Washington, was not born until a quarter of a century after Washington died. Yet, as stated before, he viewed that patriarch's face and is the only man of the present generation who ever had that privilege.

The occurrence which makes this apparently impossible thing a fact was the opening of the tomb of Washington seventy-four years ago. At that time the body of the great man was moved from one tomb to another. A committee of Congress officiated at the transfer. The coffin was opened for one brief moment and the committee's members took a last long look at the face of the man who had done most toward establishing the nation which was already growing great. The body had been competently embalmed and the face remained as in life. After this one look the coffin was placed in its new sarcophagus, hermetically sealed and placed in its new abode, where it has remained undisturbed ever since.

But when this Congressional committee on that October day three-quarters of a century ago wound its way to Mount Vernon there went with it a bit of a boy. And while its members gazed on the face of the dead one of them raised the boy aloft, and he, too, looked upon the mortal remains of the Father of His Country.

This boy still lives, having attained the ripe old age of eighty-six. All the other members of that party, being at that time men of maturity, have long since died. The boy of 1837 is the venerable patriarch of to-day, John Lane, of Washington. Now and again he becomes reminiscent and tells the stories of the men he knew in the early 30's. For then Washington was but a small town and the residents knew personally the men who were making the nation's history.

He tells of the small book store that his uncle kept on Pennsylvania avenue. There came Davy Crockett in 1834 and talked loudly of having antagonized his constituents and their consequent refusal to return him to Congress.

"My constituents," he heard Crockett say, "may go to hell, and I will go to Texas."

It is not recorded whether or not the constituents did as they were bid, but Crockett went to Texas and died gloriously in the Alamo two years later.

Next door lived Widow Gorman, who kept a boarding house and to whom a certain coxcomb who worked in the War Department owed a board bill of $100. He refused to pay it, and, on the advice of friends, she went to Andy Jackson, then President, about the matter. Jackson told her to ask the debtor for a 60-day note. The debtor gave the note and forgot it, never intending to make good. Widow Gorman brought it to the President, who indorsed it, and the widow discounted it at her bank. When the bank presented it to the debtor, saying it had been discounted, he asked who was big enough fool to indorse his note. He was told, and immediately hustled out and got the money to redeem it.

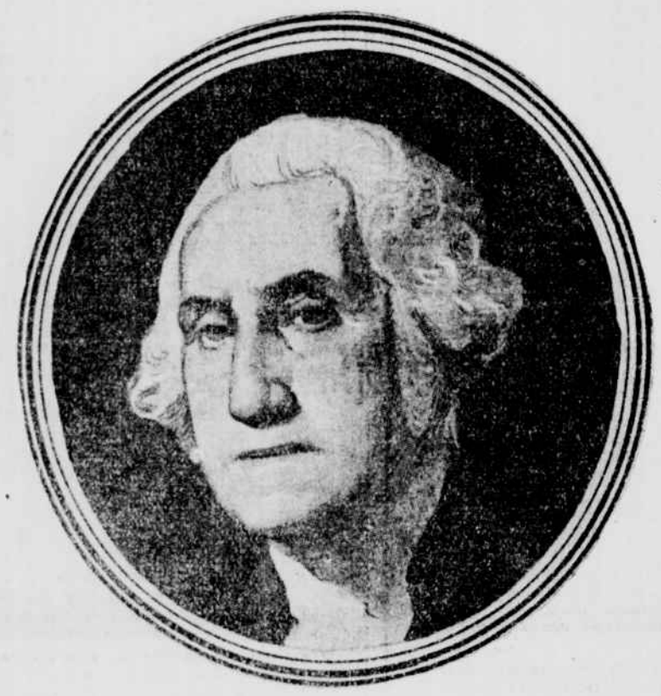
Mr. Lane speaks with relish of the garrulousness of Daniel Webster, of the fastidiousness of Henry Clay, of the great stature of Sam Houston, of the young lieutenant, Jefferson Davis, who one day brought in from Fort Dearborn, where Chicago now stands, the three Indian chieftains, Black Hawk, Prophet and Sun, as prisoners. Finally, he comes to his best story, that of his trip to Mount Vernon with the Congressional committee that viewed the remains of Washington.

George Washington had long realized that the vault which held the bodies of the dead members of his family, and was destined to hold his own, was inadequate. In his last will and testament he had said:

"The family vault at Mount Vernon, requiring repairs, and being improperly situated besides, I desire that a new one of brick, and upon a larger scale, may be built at the foot of which is called the Vineyard Enclosure, on the ground which is marked out, in which my remains and those of my deceased relatives (now in the old vault), and such other of my family as may choose to be entombed there, may be deposited."

Nothing was done in the matter, however, for thirty years. Then it was discovered that some vandal had broken into the old tomb and, in an evident attempt to steal the bones of Washington, had borne off those of some other member of the family. These were, however, got back, and the criminal punished.

"ONE OF THE COMMITTEEMEN LIFTED LITTLE JOHN LANE UP SO HE COULD SEE THE BODY OF WASHINGTON IN HIS COFFIN."



GEORGE WASHINGTON.
A copy of Gilbert Stuart's painting.

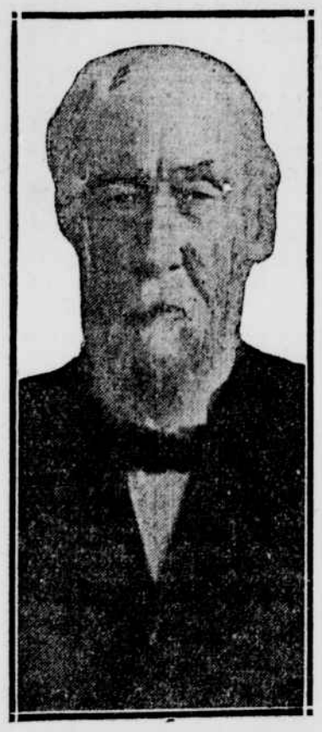
This turned attention to the request of Washington for the building of the new tomb, and in 1837 it was complete and ready for transfer. John Struthers and William Strickland, of Philadelphia, under the guidance of Major Lewis, the sole remaining executor of Washington, prepared for the removal of the body. The formal part of the transfer was to be made under the eye of the Congressional committee.

On the morning that the transfer was to be made the members of the committee had met at the book store of John Lane's uncle, and were there awaiting the coming of the coaches that were to take them to Mount Vernon. These ancient conveyances were, of course, the most perfect means of rapid transportation of the day and time. When they arrived the committeemen were stowing themselves away on the inside. Young Johnny Lane was one of a score of small boys who were looking on with youthful curiosity, and especially coveting the high seat beside the driver.

Now, Johnnie Lane was a great favorite of Henry Clay, and that courtly gentleman was a sort of master of ceremonies on this occasion. When all was in readiness and there seemed no room left, Clay, much to the surprise of the boy and much to his immediate glorification, seized Johnnie, swung him to that very enviable seat beside the driver, himself clambered aloft and the party was on its way.

The stage coaches wound their way through the outskirts of the village of Washington, across the Long bridge, and down through the much more ambitious town of Alexandria, on the Virginia side. Leaving this town, which claimed Washington for its own, the coaches took the old King's Highway, leading on to Mount Vernon. Half way there they stopped at a great water trough which had been built by Washington himself, and to which, through pipes, the waters were led from a nearby spring. Washington had always driven this way when he came into Alexandria to church or on business, and his sympathy for the horses on the long, hot drive led him to the establishment of the watering trough, which exists to-day after supplying drink to thirsty steeds for a century and a half.

Finally the party arrived at Mount Vernon. Everything was in readiness for the opening of the tomb. The new tomb, which has since been sarcastically described as "a glaring red building somewhat between a coachhouse and a cage," was ready for occupancy. The old tomb was ready to be entered. The marble sarcophagus that was to surround the old coffin was prepared.



JOHN LANE AS HE LOOKS TO-DAY.

The tomb of Washington was entered and an attempt was made to bring out his coffin. It was found, however, that the wood of it was so rotten that it fell to pieces. Inside of the wood was found the leaden casket. In this the first President had been placed at the time of his death. He had been embalmed in alcohol and sealed tightly in this casket. The leaden casket was imperishable and had remained sacred to its charge.

It was borne solemnly out of the old tomb and placed in the new sarcophagus, to be made ready for its new resting place. When it was lowered into this marble covering, and before the lid of it was put on, the whole was viewed by the Congressional committee. Here for the last time the world was to come into contact with the physical Washington. Here were men to see again what remained of that greatest of soldiers, patriots and statesmen.

In the top of the leaden casket directly over the face of the body that it inclosed a piece of glass had been fitted into the lead. This glass was cleaned of the accumulations of the past years and burnished bright, that that which was within might be seen. The Congressmen gathered about and looked through the glass.

The alcohol in which Washington had been embalmed had well performed its task. The head remained preserved as in life. His strong, characterful face was turned to one side and those who looked saw the profile. At one point on the cheek the flesh had come to the surface of the liquid, and here was a single blemish in the otherwise well preserved face.

The members of the committee gazed into the coffin. Little Johnnie Lane stood near by, somewhat awed. One of the committeemen lifted him up that he might be able to see what was within. The strongest impression that Johnnie Lane brought away with him was the hugeness of the head. It seemed herculean. The face appeared very much as it did in the pictures of Washington. The boy would have recognized it any place. He kept thinking:

"He must have been a monstrous big man."

This same impression was evidently got by one other member of the party who looked on, and who later recorded his impression. He says that they saw "a head and breast of large dimensions which appeared to have suffered but little from the effects of time."

After the party had all viewed the remains the lid of the marble sarcophagus was placed over the leaden casket. The whole was sealed in such a way as to make it airtight. It was placed in the new tomb and there has remained ever since. There is no reason to believe that the body of Washington is not to-day in the same condition that it was in when seen by John Lane in 1837. The alcohol in the leaden casket at that time covered the body with the single exception of a point on the cheek. Since then the air has been excluded and evaporation has probably, as a consequence, been very slight.

Beside the marble sarcophagus of Washington rests that of Martha, his wife. This is made of the same Pennsylvania marble as is that of the father of his country. Both were chiselled out of the solid marble. There is no seam to either except that where the lids are attached. These lids are of fine Italian marble, elaborately ornamented with the crest of arms of the United States. They were cemented on, thus converting the caskets into one unbroken whole—a block of marble with a hollow inside. In these hollows are sealed this great man and his consort.

The vault itself is built on a hillside some 200 yards from the old Mount Vernon mansion. This is perhaps the most sacred shrine in all America to-day. Here come thousands of people from all parts of the nation and even from abroad. He who visits the nation's capital always goes to the shrine of Washington.

The mansion is seen best from the Potomac River. There was never anything in America that surpassed Mount Vernon as an example of the old Colonial architecture. There was never a handsomer site for a country home than that chosen by Washington. The hill upon which it stands slopes gradually from the dock at the water front. Its slopes are covered with grasses broken by flower beds and bisected here and there by ancient hedges. Above all rise great trees, some of which are remnants of the forest primeval out of which Washington hewed his homestead. Some were planted under his direction and some have since been put out to take the place of patriarchs claimed by time.

A little down stream from the path from the landing to the house is to be found the shrine. It is no imposing structure. Artists even say harsh things about it. But to the American visitor it is a thing to be reverenced. The back end of the vault burrows into the hillside, while the front of it comes to the level of the path. Its portal is guarded by a high iron gate. The pilgrim approaches this gate, treading softly. He looks through its bars and into the sepulchre. He is surprised to know that the very caskets that hold George and Martha Washington are there in the mouth of the tomb, and may be seen from the outside. Yet such is the case. The mouth of the tomb stands open, guarded only by the iron gate.

Here the remains of the first lady and gentleman of the land have lain since that October morning of 1837 when they were so placed by a committee of Congress, who were accompanied by a small boy who is to-day the world's nearest tie to this first great American who is still without a rival in the nation's history. Here they have rested as the generations that have passed have come to do them reverence. Here they will continue to rest through all the generations that are to come, for this shrine is a hallowed thing that may be defiled by no human hand.

Old John Lane goes occasionally to Mount Vernon to visit this shrine, for he is hale and strong and a friend to the open country. But the journeys of a man of eighty-six are mostly in fancy, and his memory peoples the old haunts with a gathering that would be hard to match in modern times. Then his mind wanders to his view of Washington, and he repeats to himself that strongest impression of his youthful experience, an impression upon the correctness of which time has set its approval, for he says:

"Washington must have been a monstrous big man."

WILLIAM ATHERTON DU PUY.

TOMB OF WASHINGTON, MOUNT VERNON.

The Record of an Experience Which Makes of This Dweller in the Nation's Capital the Only Link with the Physical Washington Is Here Set Down.

Investigator Punctures Various Fibs About the Nation's Father

Continued from first page.

who find it extremely difficult to attend to their arduous labors when there is any chance at all to have a good time chasing bats and other bugs that fly by night in large cities.

At Mount Vernon General Washington devoted himself to plain farming. The Department of Agriculture had not yet been organized, and fancy farming had not been fostered by bucolic scientists. It is said that he kept 101 cows and had to buy butter for his table. This shows that the Washington family must have been great butter eaters, or that the Boss was a thrifty person, getting the top of the market for his cream and willing to buy butter for his own use from his neighbors, who needed the money. There are such. Be that as it may, anybody would be willing to pay something extra for cream from a milkman like that. Just think how a microbe would feel if caught in a cream can marked "G. W."!

Washington was "agin" the tariff—he raised only sheep enough for home use—and he considered the price of nails and barbed wire as an outrage on the ploughholders. Not a few farmers to-day still think George was all right, and they believe, he was a bigger man than "Uncle Joe" Cannon, even if he was a Southern gentleman and didn't wear jeans.

Along here it may be well to remark that Washington owned slaves, and if he had lived until 1860 he might have been a candidate against Abraham Lincoln. Wouldn't that have been a hot old campaign? And Lincoln being elected, as he was, what would Washington have done? Would he have stuck by the old flag, or would he have gone with Virginia? And if he had, what then? Oh, say, where would this republic be to-day? However, let us not worry. George's remains may have gone out of the Union with Virginia, but what he fit for stayed in, and the government at Washington still lives.

Washington was no slouch as a ladies' man, and he wanted to marry a girl in Yonkers, N. Y., but she shunted him, just like that. Think of a Yonkers girl turning G. Washington down! Yonkers people say it was because she didn't want to live at Mount Vernon, but they are envious. Mount Vernon is not so large as Yonkers, but it is a very nice town. Of course, the Mount Vernon the Yonkers people were talking about is the Mount Vernon in Westchester County, not the Mount Vernon on the Potomac. Maybe the girl thought it was the Westchester Mount Vernon where George lived. What?

But why rake over the past? Washington married the Widow Custis, of Virginia, a very estimable lady of some means and social position, and they lived happily ever after. So happily, in fact, that their names, George and Martha, have become household words all over this broad land of freedom. They do relate that Martha sometimes said things to George that he wouldn't have taken from any living man, but George was a gentleman and wouldn't hit a lady. And George never threw it up to his wife that she was his second choice, because he knew she held the cards for any bluff like that. Bachelors, no matter how popular, can't afford to be sassy with the widows they marry.

First in War! First in Peace! First in the hearts of his Country-MEN! That's G. Washington all over and repeat. Anybody would know it, though he had never heard a lot of hoodlums thump it out at a university fest. And why? Listen: At the battle of Monmouth, N. J., where Washington proved that he was first in war by mopping up the Jersey earth with the redcoats, now our best friends in a way, he observed an Irish sergeant of a Manhattan company banging into the English as only an Irishman can. He enjoyed it for a while, because it looked good to him to see the foes of his country getting it in the slats that way, but bimeby the Irishman got to be real crool and it was a shame how he was increasing the mortality list.

When it became too much for the general to stand for he rushed into the muck, regardless of his personal safety, and yanked the sergeant out by the scruff of the neck and the seat of the pants, for the general was a large and powerful man, while the Irishman wasn't bigger than a fried potato. Fortunately, the sergeant recognized his superior officer or there is no telling what other casualty might have occurred at the battle.

"Sir," exclaimed the great Washington, giving him a shake in his most dignified manner, and letting him drop, "what in thunder is the matter with you? Don't you know you ought to restrain your impetuosity and not make a slaughterhouse of the battlefield?" Which shows that Washington was entitled to the same position in peace as in war. As to the same in the hearts of his countrymen, don't the Irish own the country?

Anyway, George is all to the number one.

Considerably more might be said of Washington, but what's the use? He is not here to deny it, and that always makes biography lopsided.

Hooray for Washington! That's plenty.

WILLIAM J. LAMPTON.

"I set my boy to sawin' some wood today," said Farmer Korntop.

"Did ye?" replied Farmer Nearbye. "I'll send my boy over to help him if ye"——

"No, don't ye! I want the job did in a hurry."—The Catholic Standard and Times.

THE FORMULA.

Willis—So the play will appeal to all classes?

Gillis—Yes, indeed. It's three-quarters full of up-to-date slang, to catch the young people, and one-quarter full of old, reliable cuss words, to get the old fellows.—Puck.

THE AMERICAN WAY.

Microbe on Apple—Why is yonder man eating in such a tremendous hurry

Microbe on Pear—Appointment with his doctor. He is taking treatment for indigestion during his lunch hour, you know.—Puck.

Hotel Clerk—I found that 'Not to be used except in case of fire' placard those college boys stole out of the corridor.

Manager—Where?

Clerk—They'd nailed it up over the cabin.—Lippincott's.

Heirs of George Washington Are Still Striving to Settle His Neglected Estate

A New Administrator of Our First President's Testamentary Affairs Has Recently Been Appointed.

BY JOHN ELFRETH WATKINS.

WHILE a grateful public prepares to celebrate next Wednesday the 179th birthday of George Washington, the heirs of the first President are busily engrossed with the task of striving to settle his estate.

To this end there has lately been appointed a new administrator of his testamentary affairs, and it is a fact of no little interest that this function has been entrusted to Robert E. Lee, jr., the grandson and namesake of the late commander in chief of the Confederate army.

More than one hundred and eleven and a half years have elapsed since the country's founder signed, on July 9, 1799, the last will and testament which he had written entirely with his own hand and erroneously dated "the year one thousand seven hundred and ninety, and of the independence of the United States the twenty-fourth." In this testament he made two other errors, leaving property to persons under wrong names, but these slips of the pen were so apparent that the court carried out the very manifest intent of the will.

Five months and four days after signing this document the great general was bled to death by his physicians, while suffering from an attack of quinsy.

The will disposed of certain land "on the Western borders," which Washington described in an appended schedule as 3,051 acres in the Northwest Territory and "in the vicinity of Cincinnati, one tract near the mouth of the Little Miami, another seven, and the third ten miles up the same." These tracts, which he valued in the schedule at $5 per acre, or at a total of $15,251, he left to twenty-three residuary legatees. But he advised his executors not to sell them until they advanced in value. He foresaw the westward "course of empire" and rightly believed that by leaving the money in these lands it would increase in value far faster than through any other investment that might be made of it. So his administrators left this land untouched and had Congress pass an act protecting it from "jumpers." Then they rested upon their assumption that it was secured and died before taking steps to sell it.

But in spite of this act of Congress this land was "jumped"—so the present Washington heirs claim—as a result of unbusinesslike methods of keeping government records a century ago, and of general government neglect. So the heirs have presented to Congress a bill "to reimburse the estate of General George Washington for certain lands of his in the State of Ohio lost by conflicting grants made under the authority of the United States."

A few days ago the House Committee on Private Land Claims—which has recently held hearings on this bill—reported in favor of the Washington heirs, but recommended that they be reimbursed for their loss in an equal area of government land now vacant in the public domain. But inasmuch as all the good government land has long ago been taken up, little remaining but semi-arid and desert lands, the heirs will not be satisfied with such a settlement. However, the committee report corroborates their claim that the estate was entitled to those 3,050 acres in Ohio, and this is a step forward.

What they demand is a Treasury draft for $305,000, plus interest at 6 per cent from the date of their claim's presentation.

These tracts on the Little Miami, they say, contained a wealth of the finest oak and hickory timber which the region afforded, and one acre of the original area is worth to-day about a hundred times as much or more than any vacant public land in the public domain. Disinterested appraisers sent to look over the tracts report that some of this land, which the general valued at $5 an acre, has more than confirmed his prediction of growing values, and reported that within these 111 years much of this land has increased in value 4,000 per cent. Some of it is now worth $200, some $150 and some less than $100 an acre, and they make a conservative estimate, it is claimed, of $100 an acre for the whole area.

LAWRENCE WASHINGTON, OF WASHINGTON, D. C.
One of the heirs.

ROBERT E. LEE, JR.
Present administrator of the Washington estate.

WILLIAM LANIER WASHINGTON, OF NEW YORK.
One of the heirs.

Of this Ohio land 129 acres lie just opposite Cincinnati, on the east bank of the Little Miami, in what is now Anderson township, which includes also a place named Mount Washington. This land is within only four or five miles of Cincinnati's streets, and in the same county with that city. And a little further up the same river, after it becomes the boundary of Clermont County, are found the remaining tracts—1,236 acres in Miami, 848 acres in Union and 830 acres in Franklin townships. All of these farms are within about twenty miles of Cincinnati.

But the Washington heirs do not seek to dispossess the innocent holders of these lands. They simply ask Congress to reimburse them for their loss, as it has been done in similar cases where the government, through its negligence, has allowed first one person to enter public lands and then another to settle upon the same area.

He Is Robert E. Lee, Jr., Grandson and Namesake of the Famous Commander of the Confederate Army.

For these tracts were government lands when George Washington claimed them. Ever a shrewd speculator, he purchased two land warrants. The entries and surveys were recorded in the books of the district surveyor under General Washington's name. But in the winter before his death the general received notice that his lands were in danger on account of the practice, then growing up, of "jumping," or of relocating government land. He then wrote to the district surveyor in Ohio, who assured him that his title to the Little Miami lands was good and undisturbed and promised to notify him of any attempt to attack it. So the general made his will and died believing these 3,050 acres to be safe.

Six years after his death, however, the deputy surveyor of the same district made three entries which covered George Washington's lands completely and exactly. The general's executors—Bushrod Washington and Lawrence Lewis, his nephews—got wind that attempts were being made to jump the lands, and a distinguished messenger was dispatched to the register of the Land Office with a letter asking for the papers connected with the title to the tract.

The messenger was none other than John Marshall, the great Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. And it was just after this that the executors petitioned Congress for the act confirming their title. The act was passed by the 9th Congress, but was made general, so as to relieve all persons whose lands were in the same danger. Yet it was enacted especially to give title to the Washington lands, and it was then that the general's executors rested assured that an end had forever been put to the evil of land jumping.

Time went on, but the general's estate was never settled, and from generation to generation new administrators were appointed.

If Congress pays the full amount of the Washington claim, $305,000, the greatest extent to which any individual heir would profit would be, it is estimated, from $6,000 to $7,000, which would fall to a young woman whom, with true Virginia chivalry, the heirs will not mention because of the publicity which might thus be given to her private affairs. She would profit to this degree only by virtue of the fact that she is the only child of a father who was an only child. The individual shares of the other heirs would be insignificant, even on the maximum basis of settlement, since the Washingtons have never been prone to violate certain domestic doctrines which a now living successor of the first President has vigorously espoused.

The largest group of heirs now gathered in one locality live at Charlestown, W. Va. Other colonies of Washington heirs live in Westmoreland County, Va., and in Kankakee, Ill. Numerous descendants of the general's half-brother Augustine form a colony at Wakefield, Va., about one hundred miles down the Potomac, below Mount Vernon. They occupy six or seven farms covering the original plantation on which George Washington was born.

The lands along the little Miami are but a small fraction of the total area which those now striving to settle up the general's estate find to have been in some unaccountable manner lost to it. He left it his will 30,000 or 40,000 acres on the Kanawha River, in West Virginia, and 4,000 acres in Kentucky, near Louisville. It was upon this Kanawha tract that Washington is said to have discovered the first natural gas well known to America. He described it as a "burning spring."